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Polish Agent Gets Life Term in Spying Case

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Convicted spy Marian W. Zacharski was sentenced to life in prison Monday by a federal judge who told the Polish national that this country "will not tolerate espionage."

U.S. District Judge David V. Kenyon also sentenced William Holden Bell to eight years in prison. Bell, a former Hughes Aircraft Co. engineer, had pleaded guilty to selling defense secrets to Zacharski for gold and cash.

Kenyon said the information Zacharski obtained from Bell was damaging to the U.S. national interest, adding that it could lead to the "loss of many lives on our side" in a war.

"It seems to me that we ought to remember what we have in this country. It can be lost," the judge said.

A federal jury deliberated two days before finding Zacharski guilty Nov. 16 of conspiring with Bell to obtain and deliver film of national defense documents to Polish agents in Europe.

The government called 48 witnesses during the four-week trial. Perhaps the most damaging evidence against Zacharski was a tape recording Bell said he made during a conversation with Zacharski last June.

On the tape, played for the jury, a man identified as Zacharski asked if Bell had enough film. When Bell replied that he did and asked if the photos had been coming out all right, the second voice said, "Yeah, sure." Bell made the tape at the FBI's request. A recorder was strapped to his back.

Bell and Zacharski met at the swimming pool of their Playa del Rey apartment house and became good friends. They played tennis and jogged. When Bell needed money to pay debts, Zacharski offered to help.

Clandestine Meetings

In exchange, Bell agreed to supply classified information, passing it during clandestine meetings with Polish agents in Europe. Bell received about \$95,000 for the information.

Kenyon described Zacharski, a former West Coast representative of the Polish American Machinery Corp., as a personable and intelligent man.

The judge noted that the Pole speaks five languages and is a lawyer. Kenyon said he would be "naturally attracted" to him if they met on the street. The judge also noted that Zacharski was "willing to destroy another man" — Bell.

"Maybe you thought you were so smart that you couldn't get caught," the judge told Zacharski, who stood motionless during the sentencing. "Maybe that belief was the source of your downfall."

Probably the most sensitive information Bell passed to Zacharski involved a sophisticated antitank weapon and a highly advanced radar system, said Robert S. Brewer Jr., the assistant U.S. attorney who prosecuted the case.

Brewer called Zacharski a "highly trained and highly skilled intelligence officer," who was sent to the United States with the mission of finding someone like Bell.

"He was a 30-year-old master-mind spy who was going to ride Bell as far as he could," the prosecutor charged as he argued for a life sentence. "If he had not found Bell, he would have sought out others."

Brewer said the information Zacharski obtained provided "a clear advantage to the Warsaw Pact countries," and told the judge that it could "place in jeopardy the lives of many American soldiers and pilots."

Zacharski's attorney, Edward M. Stadum, did not concede that his client was a spy. Instead, Stadum called Zacharski a "patriot" who was being loyal to his country.

"He was a low-level intermediary who came upon an opportunity presented to him by an American who we all wish we could be more proud of than we are," Stadum said.

Stadum said Bell is considering

writing a book about his experience and may be able "to profit from his participation in this." Bell's lawyer denied that his client is involved in any such deal or has received any offers.

Bell, who pleaded guilty to espionage before the trial began, spent parts of five days testifying against Zacharski. His lawyer, Robert L. Kirste, called on Kenyon to grant Bell probation, saying that the 61-year-old engineer began rehabilitating himself by agreeing to take the witness stand against Zacharski.

Kirste raised the possibility that the U.S. government will attempt to work out a deal by which it will exchange Zacharski for an American in prison in the Soviet bloc or a dissident.

"I'll be surprised if Mr. Zacharski is not traded within six months," Kirste said. Stadum said he has not been approached about any such deal.